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the skilled mathematicians who belong to this society may find the data sufficient for computation. A rough determination for the guidance of comet-seekers would answer all practical purposes.

HISTORICAL NOTE RELATING TO THE SEARCH FOR THE PLANET *NEPTUNE* IN ENGLAND IN 1845-6.

By Edward S. Holden.

In 1876 I was in England for several months and one of my greatest privileges was the acquaintance and friendship of Mr. Lassell, the celebrated astronomer, whom I frequently visited. During one of my visits to Ray Lodge I learned the following circumstances from Mrs. Lassell and they were subsequently confirmed and explained to me by Mr. Lassell himself.

With the innate delicacy of his character he had taken every precaution that they should not become known during the lifetime of Professor Adams, and I think he seldom or never alluded to them. At this time, when the great mathematician has gone from us, it seems to be right that they should be mentioned and, with the permission of the Misses Lassell, I reproduce in what follows the brief notes I made at the time of Mr. Lassell's confidences, as a contribution to the history of the great discovery of Adams and of Le Verrier.

It is known that in October, 1845, Professor Adams, then an undergraduate of Cambridge, submitted to Sir George Airy, Astronomer Royal, the results of his computations on the perturbations of *Uranus* and the elements of a new planet—*Neptune*—which would account for the observed disturbances in the orbit of the former.* The distinguished observer, the Rev. W. R. Dawes, visited the Royal Observatory about this time, and the letters and computations of Adams were shown to him by Airy. It is known that the Astronomer Royal had, very naturally, grave doubts as to the sufficiency of these researches; but it appears that Dawes was much impressed by the letters of Adams, and that he at once wrote to Lassell to beg him to search for *Neptune*, in the region designated by Adams, with his powerful two-foot reflecting telescope (which was then mounted at Starfield, near Liverpool).

There is no doubt whatever if such a search had been made by such an observer and with such a telescope, that the planet would have been quickly found and recognized by its disc. We have but to remember that to the same telescope and observer we owe the discovery not only of the satellite of *Neptune* but also that of the two inner and faint satellites of *Uranus*.

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* See Gould on the History of the Discovery of *Neptune*. Washington, 1850.

It chanced that the letter of Mr. DAWES reached Liverpool when Mr. LASSELL was confined to his sofa by a sprained ankle, and that it was laid on his writing table near by for subsequent attention. Mr. LASSELL, also, was impressed with the importance of a search for the predicted planet and had fully resolved to make such a search.

After his recovery he sought for the letter of Mr. DAWES which gave the predicted place of the planet. The letter could not be found as it, together with some other papers, had been removed and destroyed by a too zealous maid-servant.

I think, though I am not sure, that renewed inquiry was made by LASSELL of DAWES as to the data in question. However this may have been, they were never recovered, and the mistaken zeal of the maid-servant had its full effect.

The new planet was never sought for by the most powerful telescope and the most skilful observer in England. The search of CHALLIS, at Cambridge, was fruitless, as is well known. The planet was finally found by GALLE and D'ARREST, at Berlin, on September 23, 1846, after the Berlin Observatory had received the letter of LE VERRIER pointing out its situation.

This was many months after the letter of DAWES to LASSELL.

This incident of the history of the search for *Neptune* is well worthy of record, as it shows by what a narrow chance Professor ADAMS escaped the distinction of being the *sole* discoverer of *Neptune*.

It is also worthy of remark how this and other accidents have helped to forward the Science of Astronomy. England had no higher rewards and opportunities to offer than those which she has given to ADAMS. But if LE VERRIER had been deprived of his share in the discovery it is very much to be doubted whether we should now possess that long series of elegant and laborious researches which he was able to carry out by the facilities afforded him in his situation as head of the National Observatory of France.

The whole relation of Professor ADAMS to this great discovery is again called up by this incident and the elevation of his character and the dignity of his conduct are again brought to mind.

The delicate consideration of Mr. LASSELL, who for a long lifetime kept this secret in order that no possible shade of regret should be inspired during the lifetime of Professor ADAMS, is no less honorable. It is a pleasure to be able to link in this way the name of England's great mathematical astronomer with the name of her great observer—worthy successors of NEWTON and of HERSCHEL as they were.

MOUNT HAMILTON, January 30, 1892.

NOTE: By the great kindness of a friend in England I am able to reproduce here the last picture taken of Professor ADAMS, which was made in Cambridge in September, 1891.